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Joint Inspection Unit

Review of internship programmes in the United Nations system

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Review of internship programmes in the United Nations system" (see A/73/377).

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Summary

In its report entitled "Review of internship programmes in the United Nations system" (see A/73/377), the Joint Inspection Unit addresses the role of internship programmes in the United Nations system. The review covers the period between 2009 and 2017, and is a follow-up to the previous work of the Unit on this subject (JIU/NOTE/2009/2).

The present note reflects the views of organizations of the United Nations system on the recommendations provided in the report. The views have been consolidated on the basis of inputs provided by member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which welcomed the report and supported some of its conclusions.

I. Introduction

1. In the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Review of internship programmes in the United Nations system" (see A/73/377)[1] the Joint Inspection Unit addresses the role of internship programmes as part of the ongoing reform of human resources management in the United Nations system. The review covers from 2009 to 2017, during which period the size of internship programmes in the United Nations system grew significantly. It is a follow-up to the previous work of the Joint Inspection Unit on this subject (JIU/NOTE/2009/2).

II. General comments

2. Organizations of the United Nations system welcome the report of the Joint Inspection Unit and its findings and support initiatives to reform the internship programmes in the United Nations system. Organizations are in agreement with the Inspector's view that "a convergence of modalities should not be a race to the bottom that involves adopting the lowest possible standards. On the contrary, a system-wide reform of internships should be aligned to good practices as identified in different organizations of the United Nations system and in other comparators. Coherence across the system should not jeopardize good progress in some organizations" (JIU/REP/2018/1, para. 110). Along those lines, organizations underscore the importance of retaining their ability to design internship policies that meet their respective needs and suit their context.

3. Organizations note that the implementation of the proposed recommendations, including the benchmarks, would differ in each organization and that, in some cases, additional time and resources would be required for triggering internal coordination mechanisms, as well as obtaining approval from the respective legislative bodies for those recommendations with budgetary implications.

4. Several organizations express concern regarding elements of the proposed benchmark framework for good practices in internships programmes, finding some of the benchmarks overly specific and prescriptive or that they raise liability or other concerns. More details on these concerns are provided in the context of organizations' comments on recommendations 2 and 3.

5. Organizations report having followed up on the recommendations contained in the previous report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU/NOTE/2009/2) and having undertaken significant reforms on internship policies, including giving due consideration to the findings and recommendations of the report currently under consideration (JIU/REP/2018/1) as they keep updating their internship programmes.

6. Some organizations express doubts about setting up one centrally managed internship programme for the whole of the United Nations system (as would appear to be suggested in JIU/REP/2018/1, para. 113), including the option to have it managed by United Nations Volunteers, and find that they would be better served managing their own internship programmes, or that they would need to be presented with a more detailed costs and risks/benefits analysis for the proposed centralized approach.

7. With regard to paragraph 32 of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit, the new internship policy mentioned was established by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and not the Office of the United Nations High

[1] The report of the Joint Inspection Unit is available under the symbol JIU/REP/2018/1.

Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Unit may wish to consider issuing a corrigendum.

III. Comments on specific recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Secretary-General should launch a reform of the United Nations internship programme, taking into account the benchmarking framework for good practices in internship programmes proposed by the Joint Inspection Unit in its report JIU/REP/2018/1, and report on progress made to the General Assembly at its next session under the agenda item on human resources.

8. Several organizations have already revamped or reformed their internship programmes or are in the process of doing so, including taking into consideration the most recent report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the topic.

9. Organizations express reservations about agreeing to all the elements of the proposed benchmark framework and recognize that a comprehensive reform of the internship programme would require proper coordination and consultation within the framework of the High-level Committee on Management and the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination or alternatively, as suggested in the recommendation, an executive decision by the Secretary-General.

Recommendation 2

Executive heads of the United Nations system organizations, under the leadership of the Secretary-General as the chair of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, should work together towards the establishment of more coherent internship programmes for the United Nations system, taking into account the benchmarking framework for good practices in internship programmes.

10. Organizations welcome the suggestion to introduce a more coherent internship programmes system that would foster the harmonization of good practices (as outlined in JIU/REP/2018/1, para. 110) across the United Nations system. The Secretariat further notes that the proposed recommendation could be implemented within the scope of the comprehensive reform initiative under way.

11. As for the implementation of the suggested benchmarks, organizations support adapting them to their needs and context in the light of the assessed costs and benefits. However, several organizations have reservations about numerous elements of the proposed benchmarking framework, including some of their potential financial implications. Some specific examples include: (a) benchmark 1 on real-time updates to candidates on the status of their internship applications is considered cost-prohibitive given the amount of manual intervention that would be required for a high volume of applications; (b) benchmark 2 on selection criteria is perceived to be overly specific and prescriptive, and organizations query whether it is possible to define a set of qualifications that are common to all system organizations; (c) regarding benchmark 3 on administrative support, organizations would need additional resources to modify current administrative processes; (d) benchmark 7 on leave entitlements also raises concerns as several organizations refer to current arrangements as being effective; (e) regarding benchmark 8 on hosting conditions, organizations are keen to retain flexibility to assign space based on available resources; (f) benchmark 9 on interns' travel is in several cases not aligned with organizations' travel policies; and (g) benchmark 13 on work experience is antithetical to several organizational practices on how to account for the internship

experience. While some organizations welcome benchmark 16 on eliminating the mandatory break in service, others suggest that further analysis should be undertaken as interns would not normally have the years of experience required to be recruited directly from their internships into professional positions. They note that the implementation of this benchmark might also impede recruitment for the young professionals programme and the Junior Professional Officers programme and have possible legal implications with respect to the continuity of service.

Recommendation 3

The executive heads of the Joint Inspection Unit participating organizations should consider updating their internship policies, taking into account the proposed Joint Inspection Unit benchmarking framework for good practices in internship programmes and identifying those benchmarks to be streamlined in the policies of their respective organizations.

12. Organizations support this recommendation and underscore the importance for each entity to consider the appropriateness to their needs and context, as well assessing the costs and benefits, when implementing the suggested benchmarks.

13. As indicated in their comments to recommendation 2, organizations have mixed views and reservations about elements of the proposed benchmarking framework for good practices.

Recommendation 4

The General Assembly should request the United Nations Secretariat to update the human resources framework to include a category for interns, who should not be classified under "type I: gratis personnel", thus facilitating the consideration of the introduction of compensation schemes, and to report to General Assembly at its next session under the agenda item on human resources.

14. The recommendation is addressed to the General Assembly. Organizations note that this recommendation contains the underlying key change in the recommended overall internship reform initiative, as all other recommendations in this Joint Inspection Unit review will be dependent upon it. In the Secretariat, the implementation of this recommendation would require the creation of a new category of non-staff personnel with some specific conditions of service, such as compensation, annual leave, the possibility of undertaking official business travel and the possibility of benefiting from human resources-related travel (i.e. from the place of "recruitment" to the duty station).

15. The consideration of this recommendation would further require system-wide consultations in the framework of the High-level Committee on Management of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. Organizations further note that the introduction of a new category of personnel for interns may also have budget implications, which would have to be approved by the General Assembly.

16. Lastly, organizations note that the proposed change should not mandate a compensation regime for interns, which might be unfeasible from a budgetary standpoint and would require the approval of their respective legislative/governing bodies.

Recommendation 5

The executive heads of the Joint Inspection Unit participating organizations should put in place a mechanism to systematically track information related to internships, including on gender, country of origin, university from which the highest diploma was received, duration of the internship for each intern engaged

and related costs (direct and indirect) generated by the internship programme. A report should be presented for information to the governing and/or legislative bodies of the organizations at their next sessions.

17. Organizations partially support this recommendation. While numerous entities already record and collect most or all of the information listed and stand ready to submit it to their legislative/governing bodies, if requested, others note that the report of the Joint Inspection Unit does not present a sound business case for the investment that would be required in the proposed mechanism, nor does it clarify what would be the expected value and results of reporting to the legislative/governing bodies. Organizations suggest assessing further the feasibility, costs and benefits of preparing and presenting such a report.

18. Basic information on internships is currently presented to the General Assembly in the biennial reports of the Secretary-General entitled "Composition of the Secretariat: gratis personnel, retired staff and consultants and individual contractors".

Recommendation 6

Legislative and/or governing bodies of the organizations of the United Nations system should consider approving the establishment of ad hoc multi-donor trust funds to pledge voluntary contributions to support internship schemes and request executive heads to present for their consideration proposals for other suitable innovative mechanisms to receive voluntary contributions, with no strings attached regarding selection criteria.

19. Organizations, while noting that the recommendation is addressed to their legislative/governing bodies, support measures that would allow the United Nations system organizations to compensate interns. However, some organizations, in particular those that are voluntarily funded, express reservations about the establishment of a dedicated trust fund to support internship schemes and would prefer the use of standard funding arrangements through voluntary contributions. These reservations are also informed by the preferences of member States, for example, in the case of the World Health Organization, the preference is to remain open to using all sources of funding to support interns, including flexible voluntary contributions.

20. Organizations note that while the establishment of a trust fund can be explored, this should be done taking into consideration recommendation 4 on the introduction of a new category of personnel for interns and the proposed framework for a possible compensation scheme and related costs.

21. Lastly, some organizations observe the tendency of donors to focus on programmatic elements rather than administrative ones, such as an internship programme. This approach does not recognize the capacity-building purpose of internships that incorporate both elements.

Recommendation 7

Executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations system should establish a collaboration mechanism between the public information services of the organizations and the permanent representatives of Member States to facilitate outreach to their capitals on a worldwide basis so as to attract young candidates for internships from diverse educational backgrounds from all recognized educational entities, based on the *World Guide to Higher Education* published by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

22. Organizations generally support this recommendation, even though some find it limiting, as many are already engaged in promoting internship programmes to member States and other relevant stakeholders, including youth at national universities and regional educational hubs and parliamentarians. Organizations support measures that would lead to greater diversity and inclusion in internship programmes, although some underscore the need for additional resources to meet the administrative burden that this might entail.

23. Some organizations support the basic premise that interns should preferably be recruited locally and express the preference to conduct local outreach directly with local educational institutions based on the needs of their respective offices through the country office. This option needs to be framed in the context of a clear policy distinguishing the parameters for locally and internationally recruited interns.